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AN ECLECTIC PARK

LIT BY GASLIGHT

* * *

Karl Kortum, comp.

* * *

*A gathering-in of some of the nation's best
Victorian fixtures*

Design of the Victorian Park

(Role of the San Francisco Maritime Museum)

Cable car turnaround. The Maritime Museum proposed that the cable car line be extended into the park in 1949. The present position of the turntable was arranged by the Maritime Museum in 1955.

Waiting room. The Maritime Museum proposed in 1949 that a period waiting room be erected in the park alongside the cable car terminus. One proposed design by Municipal Railway was rejected, one by Western Pacific likewise. The first plan by Campbell & Wong (the architectural firm suggested by the Museum) was rejected, but the present plan by Campbell & Wong was accepted and turned over to Beaches and Parks.

Waiting room bench. The Maritime Museum discovered the prototype of this bench in the Castroville railway station, Monterey County, and obtained it by gift from Southern Pacific. Expansion of bench to accommodate present hexagonal shape developed by Maritime Museum curator and pattern maker.

Exterior benches. The Maritime Museum discovered the prototype of this bench at the Heritage, Laguna and Bay Streets, and arranged loan of bench for reproduction purposes. Expansion of bench developed by Maritime Museum curator and pattern maker in accordance with the increased size of the human posterior over a century's time.

Newel posts for handrails. The Maritime Museum discovered the prototype for this spiral post in front of an old house at 1362 Van Ness Avenue. This post was borrowed by the foundryman in order to make a pattern. (Permission to borrow granted in return for making new post to replace broken post in owner's front fence.)

Handrails between newel posts. Adapted by Beaches and Parks from a photograph taken by Maritime Museum in Western Addition before that section of city razed. Details of joining with newel posts and spacing of ornamentation modified at suggestion of Maritime Museum.

Tree guards. Book titled One Hundred and Twenty Photographic Gems of Scottish Scenery furnished by Maritime Museum to Beaches and Parks provided design for tree guards. Museum suggested modification of Beaches and Parks plans by substitution of rivet fastenings instead of modern welding.

Tree gratings. Maritime Museum suggests substitution of cast iron gratings for modern welded gratings around 25 trees. Provided photograph taken in Philadelphia by Museum to show design. Museum suggests concealed fastening device to prevent theft of gratings.

Gas lamps. Maritime Museum conducts research for Beaches and Parks on types of gas lamps used in San Francisco street lighting and locates supplier of used Wellsbach gas lamps removed from streets of Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Gas lamp standards. Maritime Museum objects to using lengths of pipe to support gas lamps throughout park; suggests ornamental cast iron standards and locates standards in Cleveland, Ohio, through local supplier.

Fountain. With levels for horses, people, dogs, cast in 1870s and formerly in front of the Kelly, Donohue Bank on Montgomery St., proposed for use in park by Maritime Museum. Rejected in first Beaches and Parks plan. Accepted in second plan and donation by owner of fountain arranged by Maritime Museum.

Cobblestones. Use of cobblestones as decorative element in park proposed by Maritime Museum. Rejected by Beaches and Parks in first plan. Accepted in second plan.

Illumination. Maritime Museum suggested elimination of present outside cable car signal pole and mercury vapor lamps as visually offensive both by day and by night. Negotiated with Muni Railway for their removal. Suggested shielded light source to illuminate cable car turnaround so as not to conflict with gaslight illumination. Suggested design for shorter lamp standard employing cast iron base, rolled tapered steel pole. These designs were incorporated into plan.

Bollards. Ornamental, cast iron. Photographed by Museum in front of an old school, since demolished, in New Bedford, Mass. Maritime Museum curator made scale drawings from enlarged photograph and subsequently developed wooden pattern with professional patternmaker. At Museum insistence, lengths of steel pipe stuck in ground by Beaches and Parks removed and fifteen of the New Bedford bollards cast from this pattern were substituted.

* * *

The foregoing items concern details of the Park. In broad terms it should be stated that:

- a. The Maritime Museum conceived the idea of an old-fashioned park or plaza on this site. The plaza to be part of the Museum's over-all plan encompassing

the Hyde Street Pier, the historic ships, the Haslett Warehouse, the Hyde Street cable line extension and the Maritime Museum. The original drawings of this project were first published in 1950, seven years before adoption of the plan by the State of California as the San Francisco Maritime State Historical Monument.

b. The Maritime Museum blocked sale of the plaza site for apartment house use in 1955 when disposal was recommended by the Mayor.

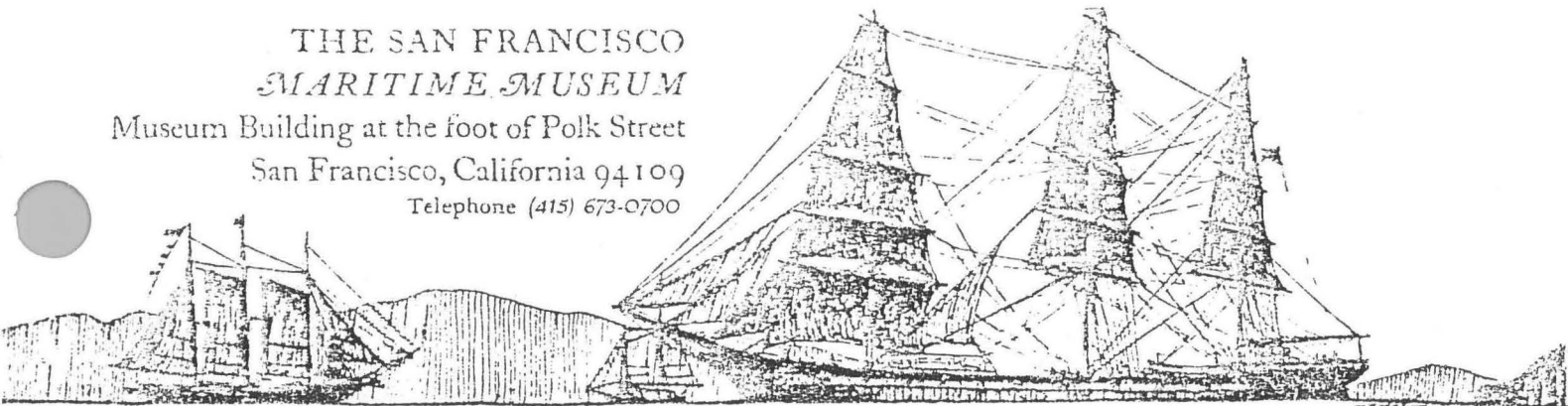
c. The Maritime Museum campaigned actively for establishment of the State Historical Monument at this site in 1956 and 1957, taking an unpopular position in opposition to City Hall, which wanted San Francisco's State Park to be located at the Ferry Building.

d. The Maritime Museum rejected* the first plan for a park prepared by Beaches and Parks because of its poor detailing (lack of ornamental benches, cobblestones, tree guards, fountains and other period adornments). The Maritime Museum was told in a meeting at Sacramento that this was the best the State could come up with, but that the Museum was welcome to pursue the matter and provide a more satisfactory plan. The State Park Department was stating that they could not design this kind of park.

e. The Maritime Museum interested Thomas Church, the distinguished San Francisco landscape architect, in reviewing the Beaches and Parks plan. Mr. Church included all the Museum's ornamental wrought iron and cast iron embellishments and provided further concepts which the State made use of in its final plan. These include tree planting arrangements in the upper mall, location of fountains, cobblestone borders under benches and inset cobblestone strips in cable car turnaround, grand staircase effect toward lower part of park, spacing and repetition of ornamental ironwork, etc. Out of respect for the San Francisco Maritime Museum, Mr. Church made a donation of all his efforts

* See letter to State Historian, Oct. 1, 1959

THE SAN FRANCISCO
MARITIME MUSEUM
Museum Building at the foot of Polk Street
San Francisco, California 94109
Telephone (415) 673-0700



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October 1, 1959

*Dr. Aubrey Neasham, Historian
Division of Beaches & Parks
1125 Tenth Street
Sacramento 14, California*

Dear Aubrey:

As I mentioned to you on the telephone yesterday morning, I had a chance to visit the Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument a couple of weeks ago, and I was delighted with the tangible history that you have induced the State to take in hand. I had no idea that the area was as large, or the surviving buildings so numerous and characterful. As Los Angeles gets bigger and bigger, and slicker and slicker, how they are going to cherish this vestige of the pioneer village and town!

After seeing how well the Division has wrought down there -- atmosphere, historical accuracy, and function in a pleasant blend -- I returned increasingly disturbed about some aspects of the Maritime Historical Monument here in San Francisco.

In brief, I think that Block 9 is being bungled.

Not all of it, but some of it.

Here is the central plaza, the area where the visitor alighting from a cable car (full of zest for all that is old San Francisco) receives his first impression.

The impressions that will assail him under the present plans are those of a banal backyard in Marin County . . . of a bourgeois barbecue behind a \$28,000 home in Escondido.

It is not old San Francisco. It is last month's Sunset Magazine (The Magazine of Western Living) reduced to further anonymity by too many cooks stirring the broth.

Cooks aplenty, but chefs none. The two figures most needed in a development of this kind -- the artist and the historian -- are conspicuous by their absence.

Curiously, these criticisms apply only to the accoutrements. All the rest of it -- ground use, contours, paths, plantings, appear to be excellently conceived. Timidity sets in only when it comes to the embellishments that can -- if rightly done -- give this little park a period flavor that will make it celebrated across the nation.

The word "period" seems to strike fear into some hearts up there. Emmett Blanchfield tells me he is laboring under a piece of composite gobbledygook which calls for "a contemporary park with period overtones". No wonder he has redwood slab benches reminiscent of a 19¢ hamburger drive-in mixed in with the brick walks of outer suburbia and here and there orphaned a chunk of Victorian cast iron work.

What is needed are clear orders issued to a team consisting of an artist and a historian. After all, this is a Historical Monument. It deserves the best. What is needed is an interior decorator who can decorate exteriors, or it might be best to call in the Art Department of a reputable motion picture studio as a consultant.

Some of my concerns:

- 1. Your planners are afraid of cobblestones. They are using a minimum. Yet cobblestones (basalt blocks) are the essence of old San Francisco. Happily they are a feature of both the old waterfront and cable car right-of-ways so they make the perfect conjunctive material in this particular park.*

Mystic Seaport, the biggest tourist attraction in Connecticut, has purposely paved large public areas with cobblestones -- and as a private historical society they can afford lawsuits for slips and falls far less than the State of California. The Recreation and Park Department has recently paved a small, much-traveled plaza on Market Street with cobblestones for atmospheric purposes surrounding the Mechanics Monument.

2. *The contemplated redwood benches are sheer horrors in this setting. We have scouted up three styles of graceful, ornamental cast iron and wood benches that can easily be reproduced, but use of only one such bench is contemplated.*

Seating in California's parks (even in this one) apparently has to be done on redwood and concrete bleachers with that institutional look.

3. *Paving. Combined with red brick planter boxes, I strongly suspect that red brick walks are too much. Areas of concrete and redwood header boards are a sin in this setting.*
4. *Brick planter boxes. Expensive. Characteristic of not much of anything. Better in most cases to use Victorian cast iron fretwork borders ca. 8 inches high. Museum can supply patterns. These borders would supply a distinctive note and be a happy blend with the ornamental benches.*
5. *Gaslights. Are there too many? Is a good idea (Emmett Blanchfield's) being overdone? The function of gas lighting as I understand it was not to bring up the general illumination of an area -- they are too inefficient for that. Too many gas lamp posts would make the area look like a picket-fence in the daytime. Old photographs of San Francisco show a couple on each side of the street (staggered) per block.*
6. *Gaslights. Is one of the actual styles used on San Francisco streets in days gone by being reproduced, or is a corny catalogue item "for the front path to your home" being substituted?*
7. *Homogeneity. Mr. Garo Dorian, architect, recently paid us a call and left a cogent suggestion that will go a long way towards solving the problem of the incongruous Maritime Museum, Eastman Kodak and other modern structures in the area that are likely to be with us for many years to come.*

Extend the strong theme elements of the Block 9 park, notably gas lights, ornamental benches, and here and there a touch of cobblestones, on down the street in front of these structures. Mr. Dorian predicts that a surprising degree of homogeneity will be achieved, and I agree with him.

The City would have to be persuaded to make these changes on their street portions, but that persuasion is a task that we would cheerfully take on.

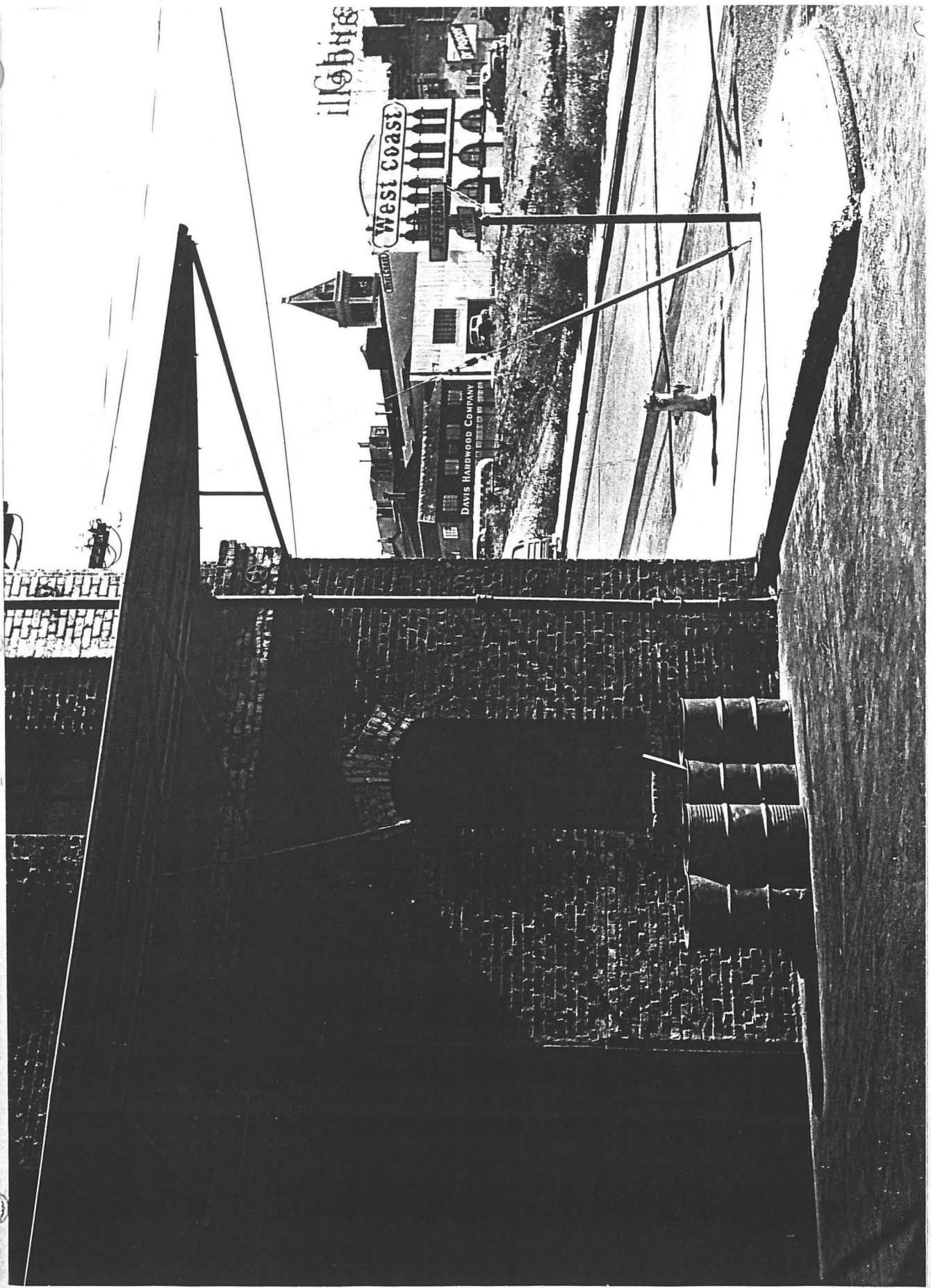
Obviously, if the Block 9 park is themeless, as presently planned, there would be no motif to extend down the street.

I don't think that the State can afford plans that have been reduced to mediocrity -- not at a cost of \$100,000.

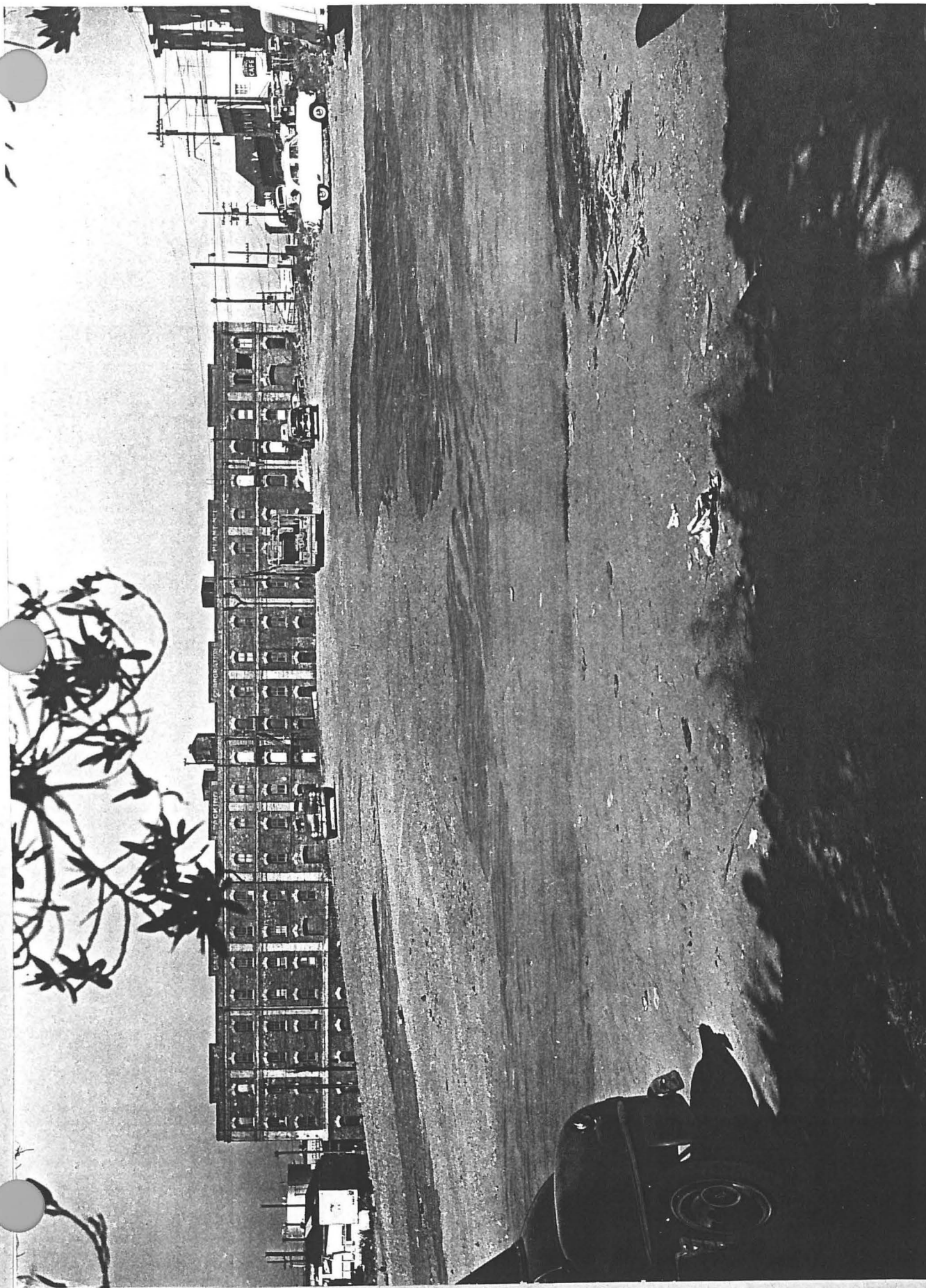
Sincerely,

Karl Kortum
DIRECTOR

KK:tj
Encl:



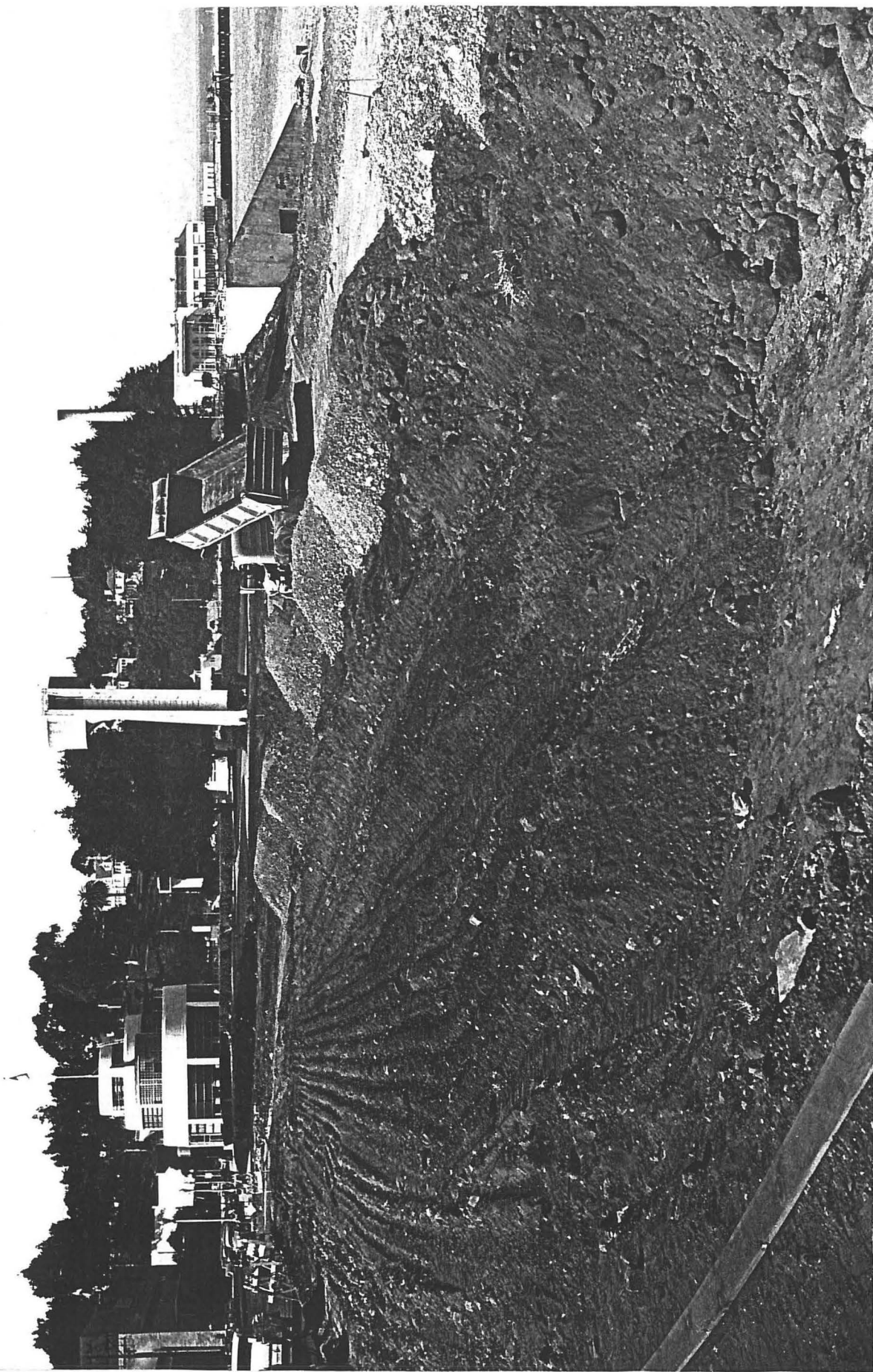
It was not a park, it was an industrial area . . .



Victorian Park site was an empty field.



The Maritime Museum persuaded the State Park department to make it a park.



Land fill was moved in.

3/9/84

HERB CAEN

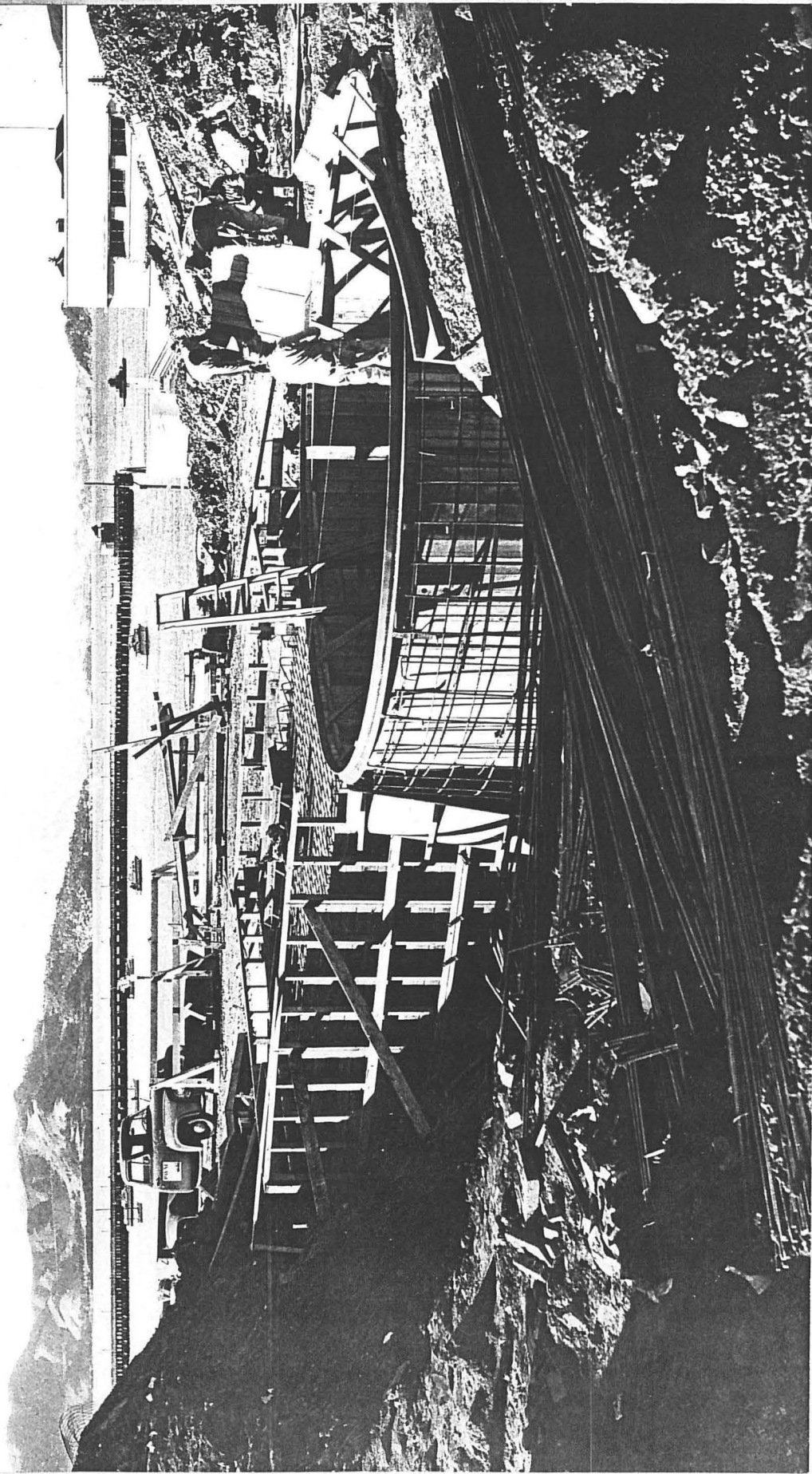


Columnists Do It Weakly

PASSING FANCY: Freudian Slip of the Week honors to Atty. Bob Mezzetti, Quarterback Joe Montana's lawyer in the Joe-vs.-Cass marital heartache. In his brief, dug up by Bill Workman, Mezzetti argues that the couple's Woodside ranch should be sold "because the Montanas are in the throws [sic] of dissolution proceedings" ... The big laugh out there on Jordan Ave. is that Bob Zelinsky's house is being painted by Tee-Van, even though Bob is retired board chairman of Zelinsky, the big painting firm, and his cousin Ed is its current president. Why Tee-Van? Bob: "They're cheaper" ... Yes indeed, people are talking about "People Are Talking" on KPIX. Especially yesterday morning's show, on which Craig Claiborne, the eminent food expert of the New York Times, was asked to name his favorite S.F. restaurant. He promptly replied "Kee Joons in Burlingame," thereby breaking the hearts of all those local restaurateurs who namedrop him among their close friends and admirers.

★ ★ ★

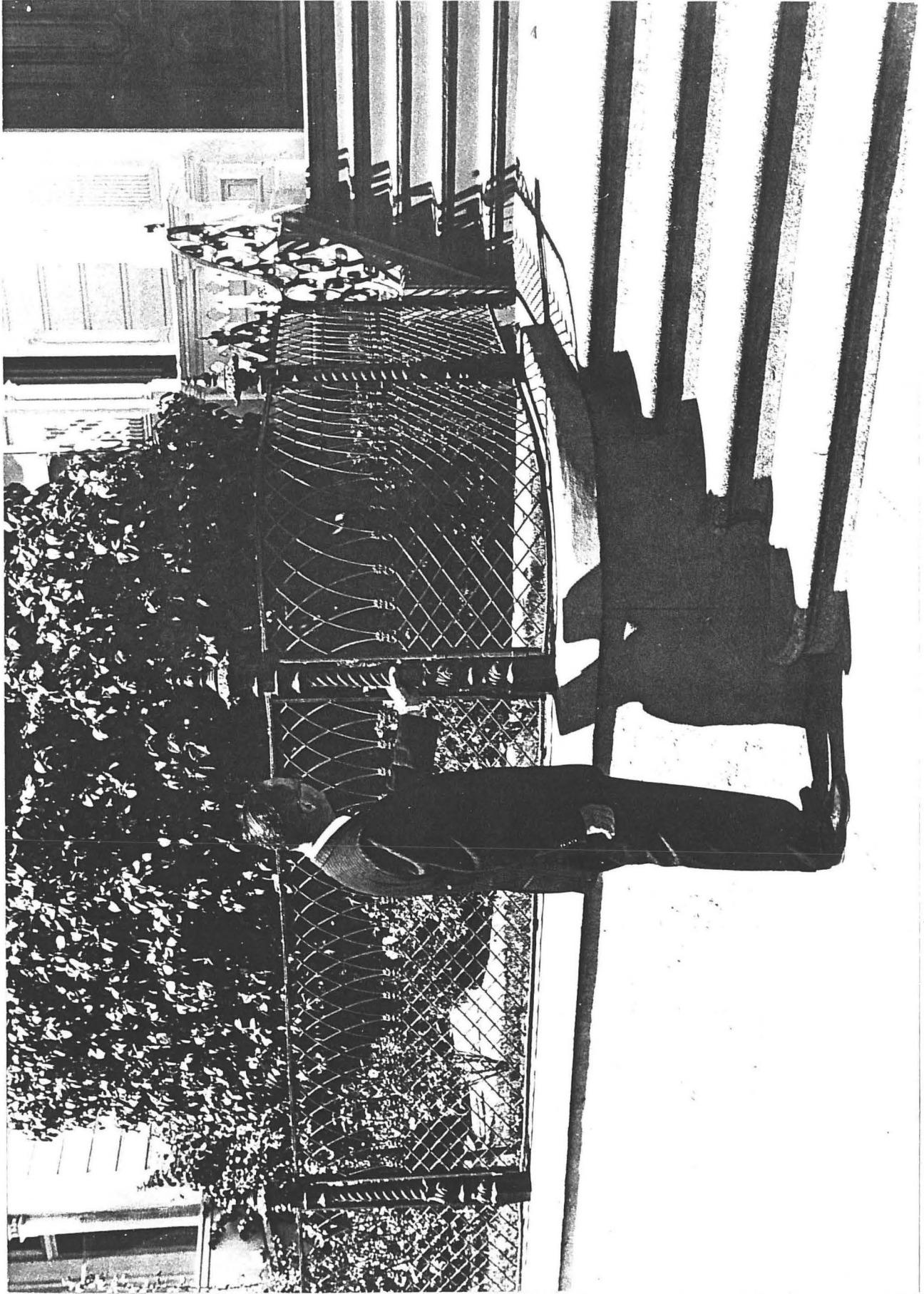
SPEAKING OF civic disgraces, how about the public dumping of private property in that garden spot of the universe, Golden Gate Park? It has long been bad but it's getting worse: not just gobbidge — furniture, chairs and other junk, too. Sixth Ave. and Kennedy Dr. seems to be a favorite spot for the oafish offenders, who should be deported ... Sodden thought while watching the new cable car turntable go into Victorian Park: both the cable extension and the pretty park itself were the bonny idea of one person — Karl Kortum of the Maritime Museum, no longer unsung hero he ... The backroom guessips at Ch. 7 (in the midst of a shakeup) hear that the contracts of Valerie Coleman and Gary Rebstock will not be renewed.



A cable car turnabout was built.



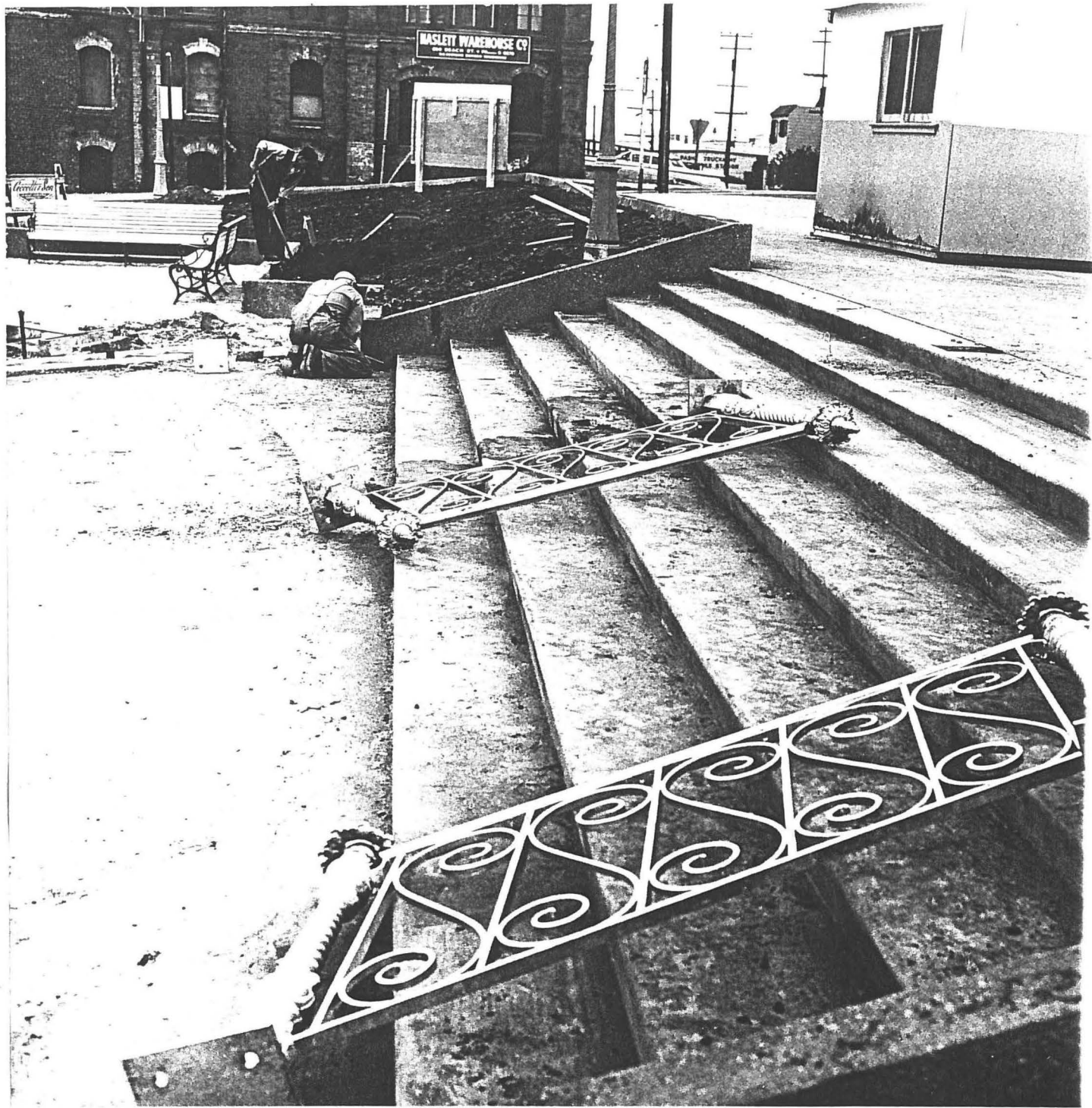
Actual gas lamp standards were obtained from an antique dealer in Cleveland, Ohio.



The ideal newell post turned up at 1362 South Van Ness Avenue. One post was borrowed to make a pattern.



The railing design for between the posts came from the Western Addition before it was destroyed.



The Van Ness avenue newell posts and the Western Addition railing design are combined for the new park.



Three designs for a waiting room were rejected until a satisfactory one was found.



Southern Pacific's Castroville station near Salinas provided a bench design.



The patterns derived from it, however, were altered to create an hexagonal bench.



Another bench design came from the old Crocker estate. They were found at an old people's home at Laguna and Bay



After the Maritime Museum curator widened the seat two inches to accomodate the modern derriere, several dozens were cast.

MANITOU MACHINE WORKS

14 MORRIS AVENUE • COLD SPRING, NEW YORK 10516 • PHONE 914 - CO 5-3153

TO: Karl Kortum, Director
San Francisco Maritime Museum
San Francisco, Cal. ~~94113~~

DATE: December 3, 1976

SUBJECT

MESSAGE

Dear Karl Kortum:- We very much enjoyed your article 'Opportunity in San Francisco' in the July, 1976 issue of Sea History. On page 27 of the journal, in the photograph of you and Capt. Fred Klebingat, we were much taken with the design of the park bench, for we make Victorian park benches. If this is not a copyrighted design, we wonder if it would be possible to obtain a photograph or drawing of the bench, or possibly the name of the manufacturer? Thank you,

TOM RICK

REPLY

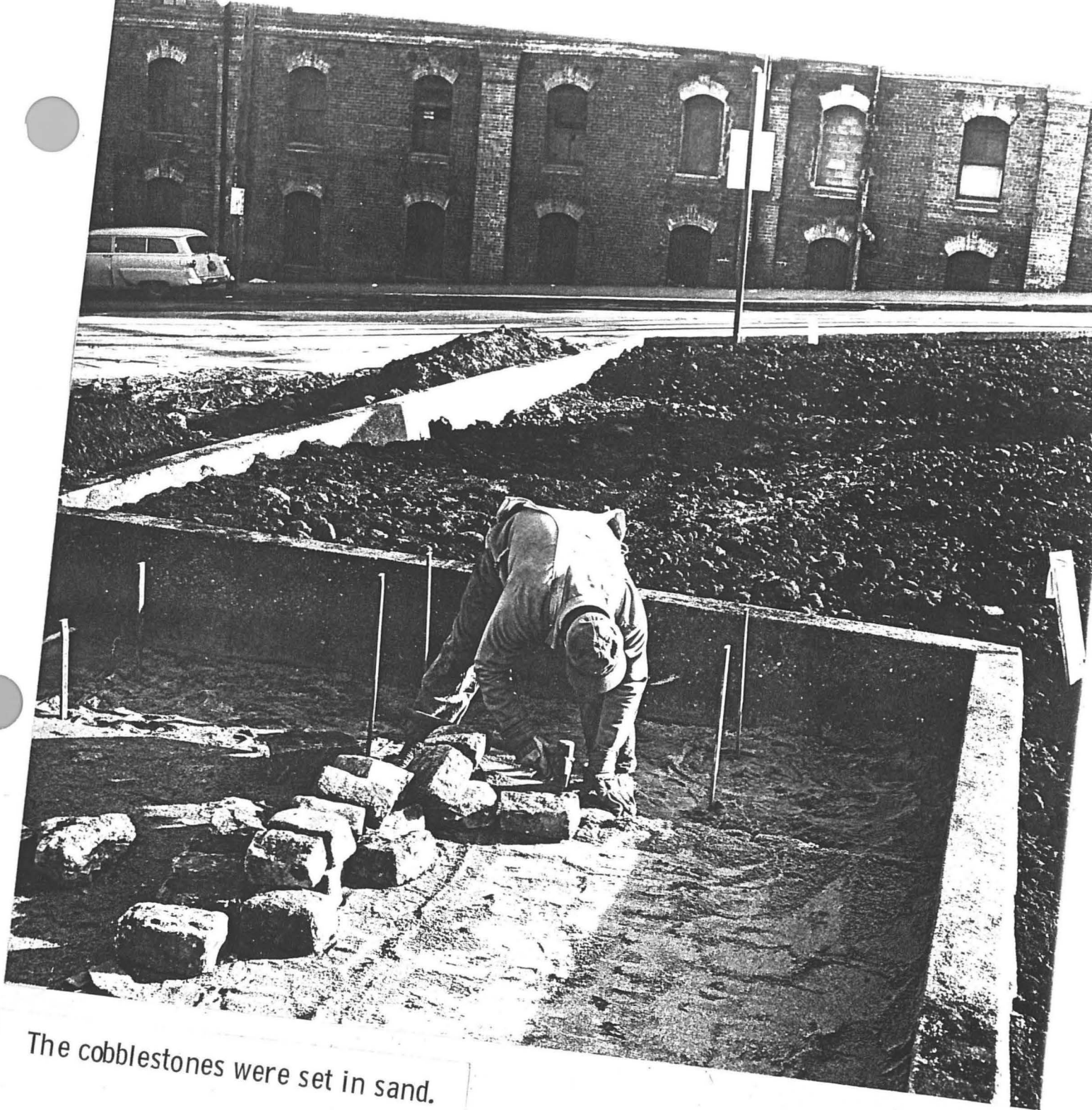
Dear Mr Rick:

The original of the bench came from an Old People's Home at Laguna and Bay Streets here. I understand that the home was largely established by the Crocker family of railroad fame (built the first transcontinental rr. in 1869) and that the bench "came from the Crocker estate."

We borrowed one and our curator here, Mr. Harlan Soeten, added another two inches to the width to accomodate the larger derrieres of today. Then a paternmaker went to work. The benches were cast by Phoenix Iron Works of Oakland, Calif., who have retained the patterns and sell the benches.

The bench is the most comfortable I have ever encountered and I have studied iron benches in many countries. Springy slats and a good shape to grip the back. We should have retained the pattern.

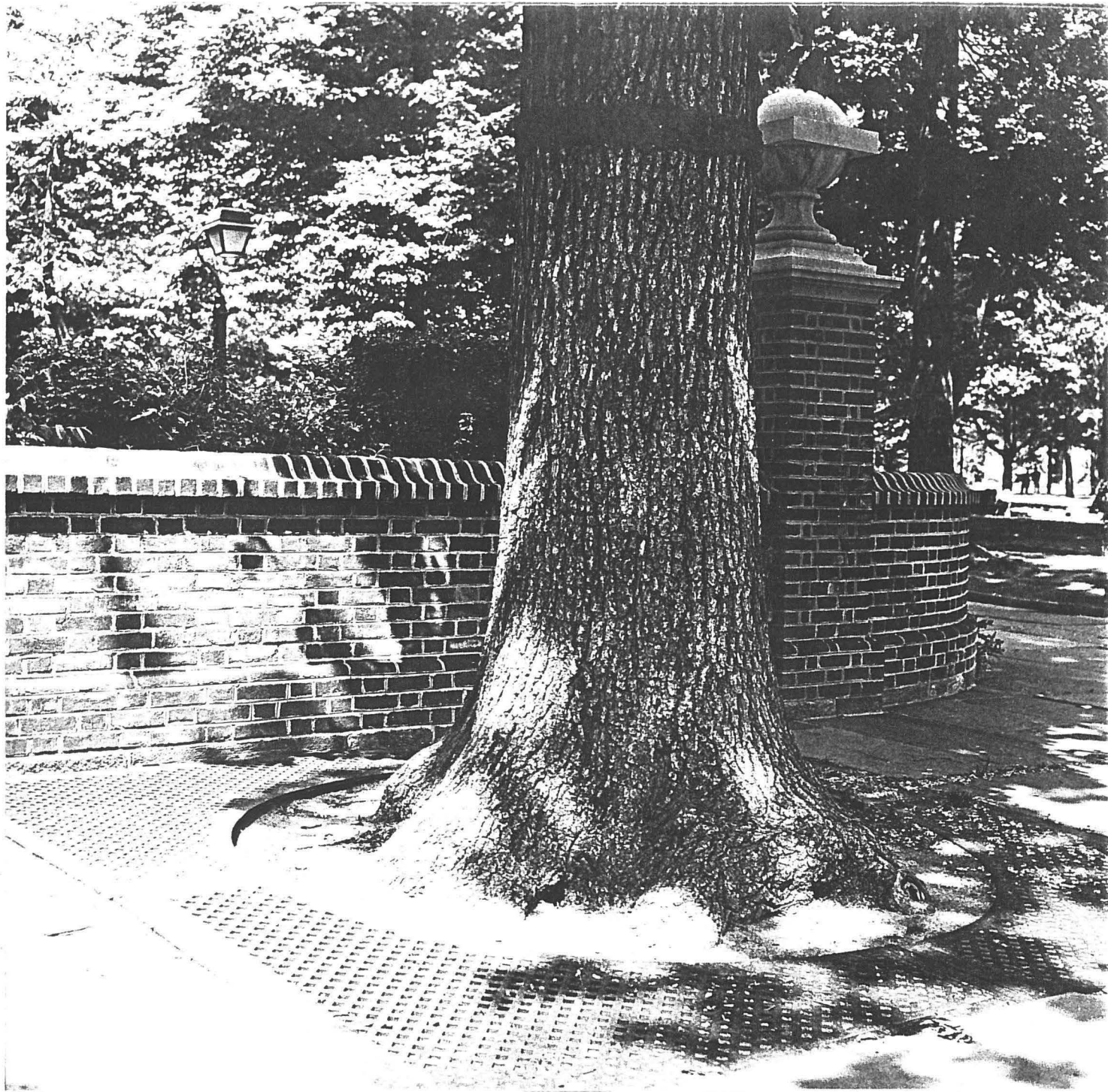
Karl Kortum



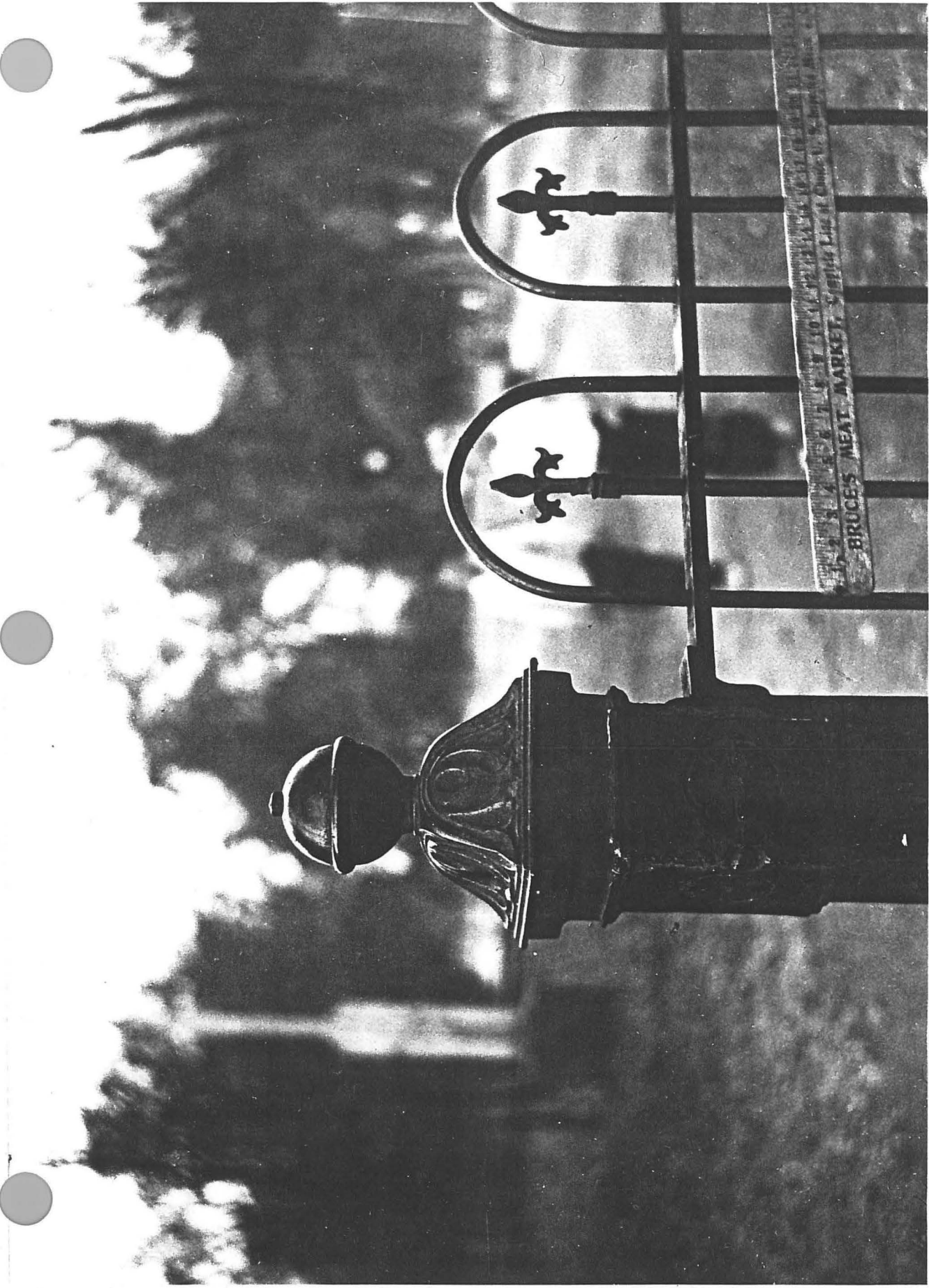
The cobblestones were set in sand.



The tree guard grill design.



. . . came from near Independence Hall in Philadelphia.



The fence around the cable car turntable is derived from the Bidwell mansion in Chico.

7/17/59

Dave: Nelson

Would appreciate your wangling a chance for us to review the Block 9 plans from de Turk if possible---I am still concerned about the sparkle being missing from Blanchfield's thinking when it comes to old-time hardware.

It those monstrous bendhes he dreamed up are still in, we've got a clinker right in the middle of things.

This might prove a helpful approach:

Bill White took me out to see a little castiron fountain at 23rd & Florida Sts. some months back. It had originally sprouted in front of Peter Dpnahue's bank in downtown San Francisco in the sixties or seventies.

A little gem--nothing less. Only about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, but with a level for dogs, a level for kids, and a level for horses. Name of foundry, patent dates, etc. still clearly legible. Bill had wangled a tentative okeh for us to use it from a Mr Mariani, the owner, proprietor of a hardware store out in the Mission. (This over the objections of an old maid sister) Many people after it, antique collectors and the like these many years.

I called Blanchfield about this. "Next time he was down . . ." Nothing happened. I wrote him a reminder after six weeks or so. No answer.

This is a bum rap for a hell of a nice fixture that could go in any corner of Block 9 landscaping and give it distinction. As a matter of fact it would be the piece de resistance of all the cast iron we're pouring into our neighboring lot. The kind of thing that becomes a conversation ;iece (or column piece) and sums up the effect we're trying to create.

deTurk is sympathetic to this kind of stuff and the Peter Donahue fountain (that's ~~the~~ Peter Donahue contribution, Mechanic's Monument, across from Shell Bldg on Mkt. He started Union Iron Wks., now Tom Ingersoll's yard) might prove entree into plans, which, as a matter of fact, we should have been asked to review. After guarding that field for a decade.

Best,

KK



A fountain with levels for humans, horses, and dogs was moved from the Mission district.



The State Park department was persuaded to use castings instead of lengths of pipe for bollards.

November 26, 1962

Mr. Philip Purrington
Curator
Bourne Whaling Museum
New Bedford, Mass.

Dear Mr. Purrington:

On my visit to your city a couple of years ago I made the enclosed photograph of barrier posts in front of a school at Russell & Pleasant Streets. The post is the handsomest that I have seen anywhere around the country, and I have persuaded the State of California to reproduce it for a similar function in a period park next to our Museum.

Needed is an architect's or patternmaker's dimensioned drawing of the post (if the school board has no objection) which would enable a patternmaker out here to make a wooden pattern from which a number could be cast. Can you offer any suggestions as to whom we should contact. Perhaps the best way to proceed would be to have a price on both a drawing and on a wooden pattern made by a professional patternmaker in New Bedford.

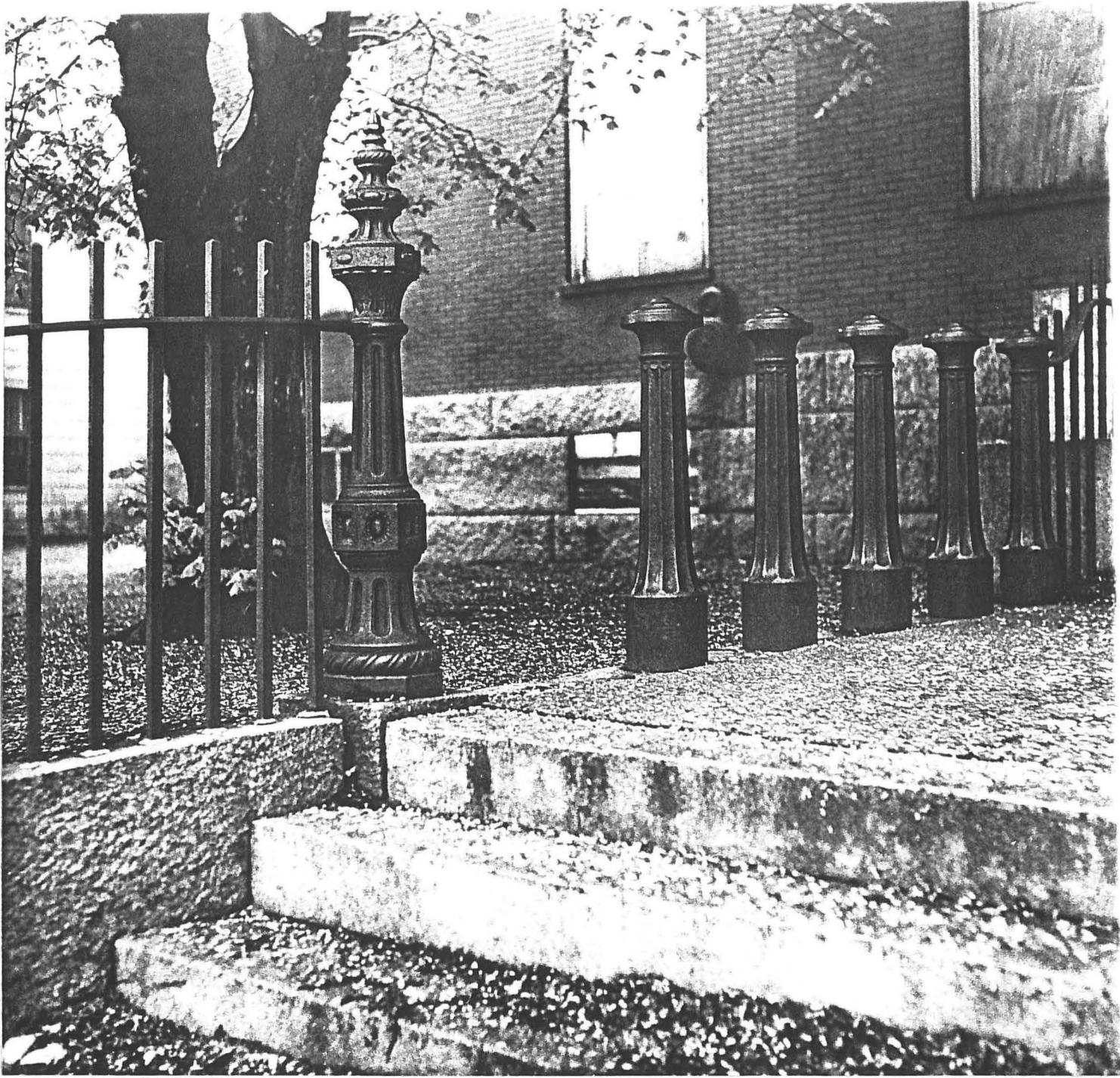
Any help that you can give us on this matter would be much appreciated.

I continue to hear fine things about your Museum, and the recollections of my visit there are among the most pleasant enduring from my trip east.

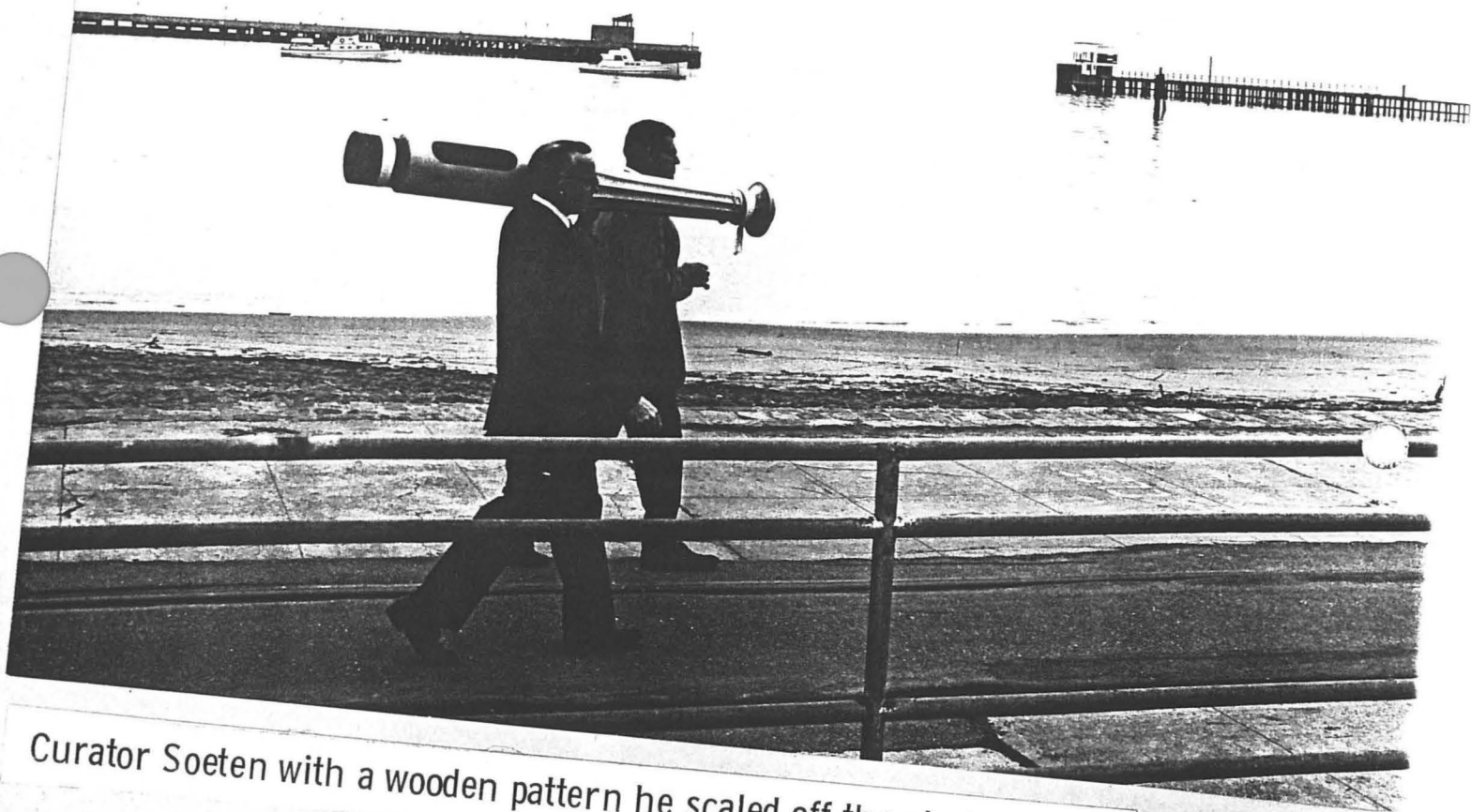
Sincerely,

Karl Kortum
DIRECTOR

KK:tfj



The design came from in front of a school in New Bedford, Massachusetts.



Curator Soeten with a wooden pattern he scaled off the photograph.

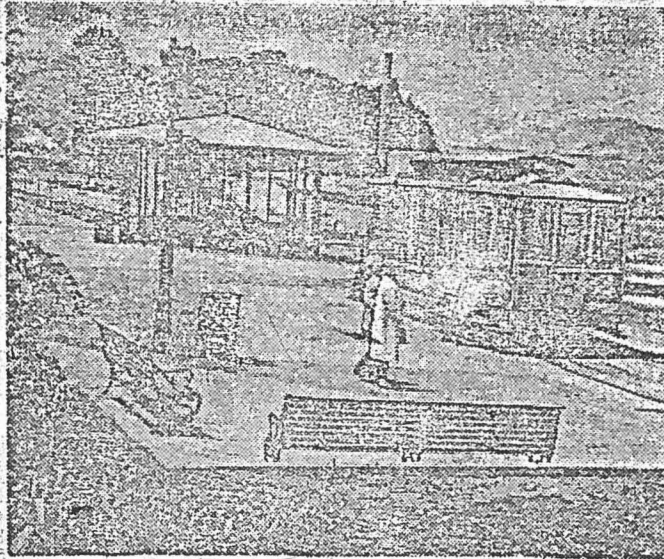


Cobblestones (basalt blocks) and cast iron to give the Haslett Building a proper setting



Wellsbach lamps from Baltimore were located.

Compare This Park With Civic Center!



Cable car turns at plaza beside bay

Editor: About as much as I deplore the coldness, stiffness and general all-around bad appearance of our present Civic Center Plaza, with its pathetic fountains, so do I rejoice over the out-of-this-world turn table plaza at the end of the Hyde st. cable car, next door to Aquatic Park.

It is eye-catching and well thought out, from its pavilion to the gas light lamps to the benches, which are benches built to sit on and linger for a while while drinking in the marvelous marine view.

Every San Franciscan who takes pride in our city owes it to himself to go and take a good look at this plaza.—
F. Methner, 327 Jersey st.

News-Call-Bulletin

San Francisco's Evening Newspaper

CHARLES H. SCHNEIDER
Editor

WELLS B. SMITH
General Manager

860 Howard St., Telephone EX 7-5700

☆ Thursday, May 17, 1962 Page 14

Give Light and the People Will Find Their Own Way



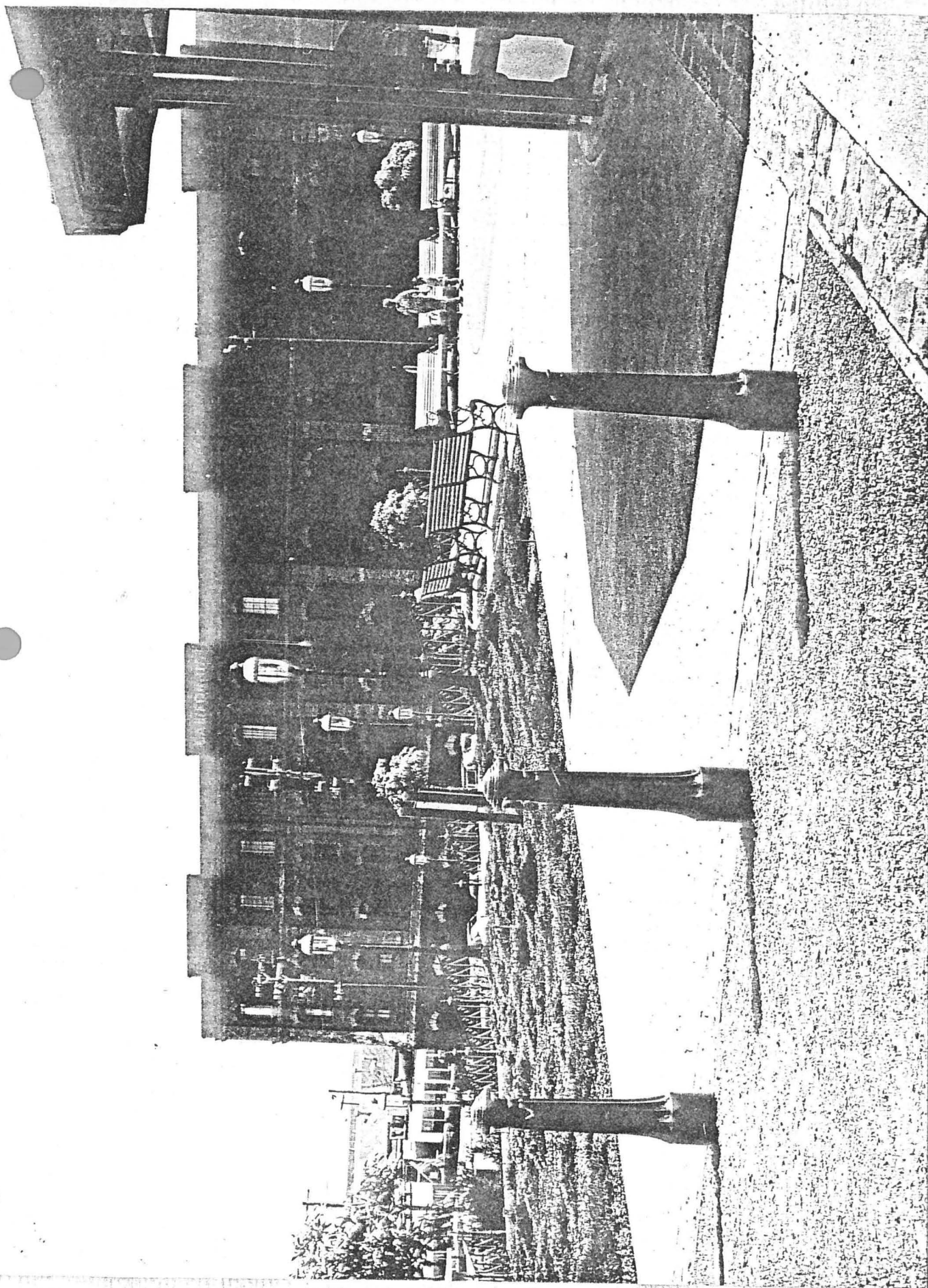
Karl Kortum and Capt. Fred Klebingat in Victorian Park during construction, Feb., 1962.



A fountain with levels for humans, horses, and dogs was moved from the Mission district.



A12.17568.1n



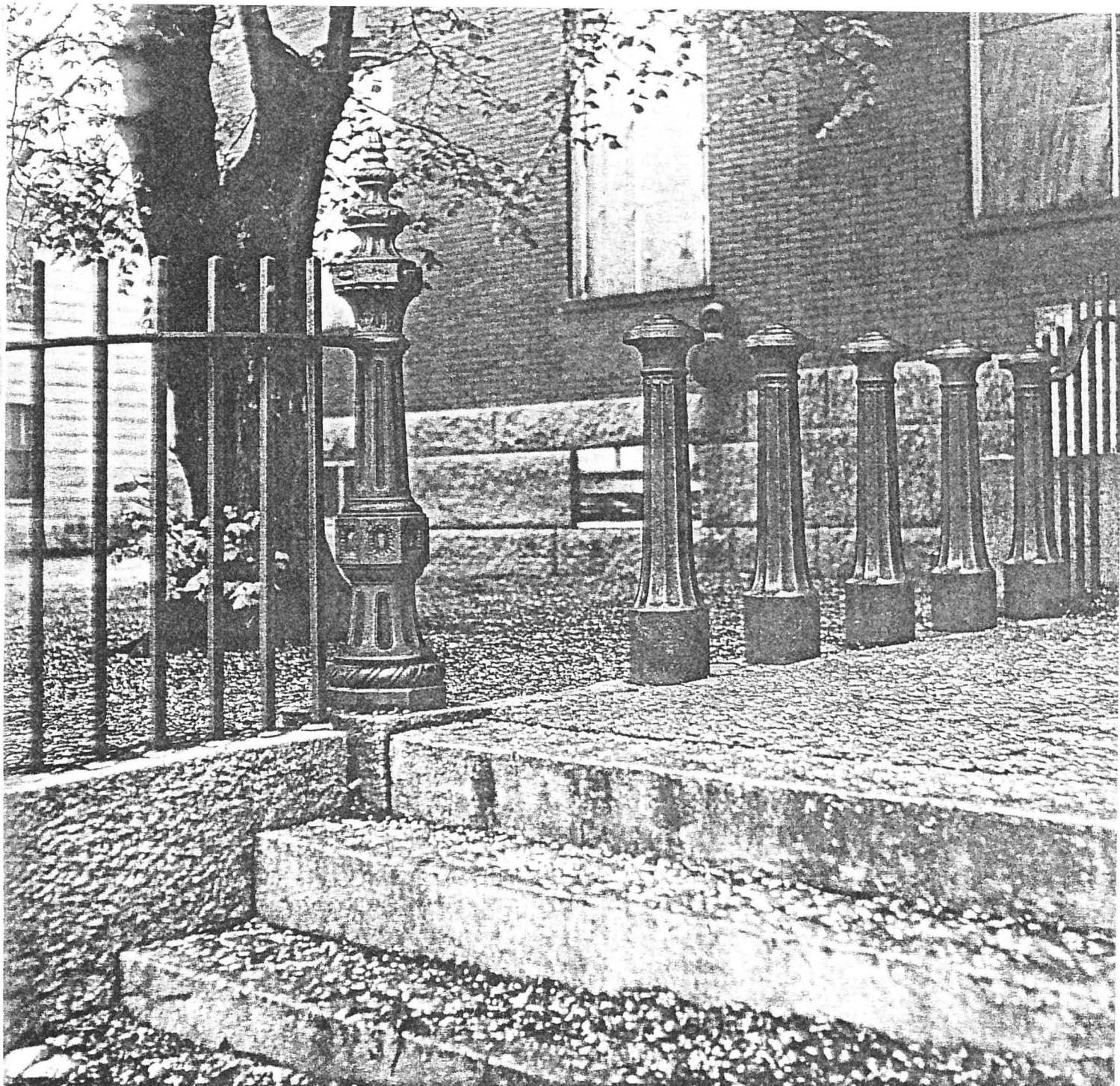
The State Park department was persuaded to use castings instead of lengths of pipe for bollards.

ALZ 17707



Curator Soeten with a wooden pattern he scaled off the photograph.

A12.17669



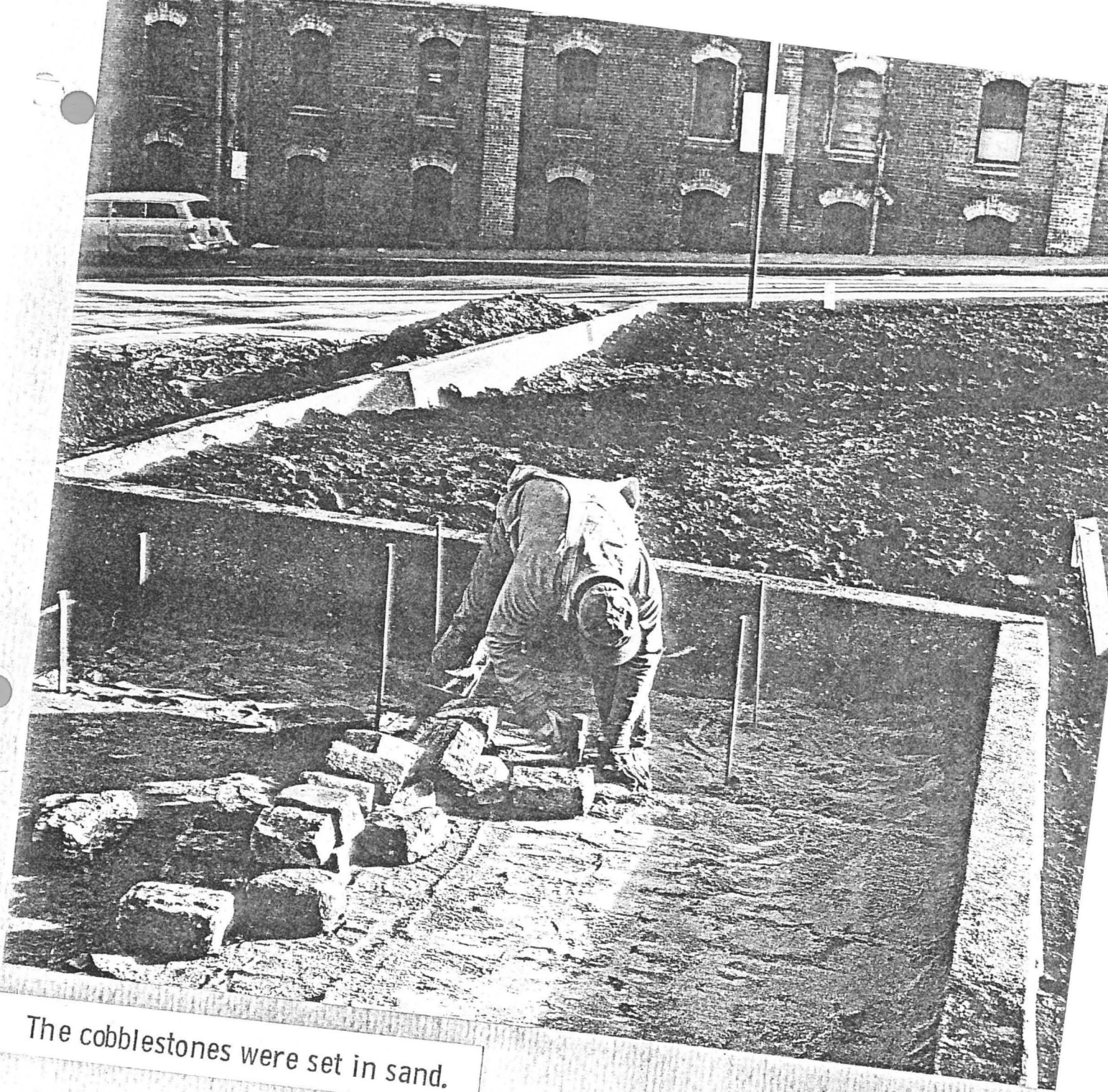
The design came from in front of a school in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

J12.163



The fence around the cable car turntable is derived from the Bidwell mansion in Chico.

I 12,17569.1 n



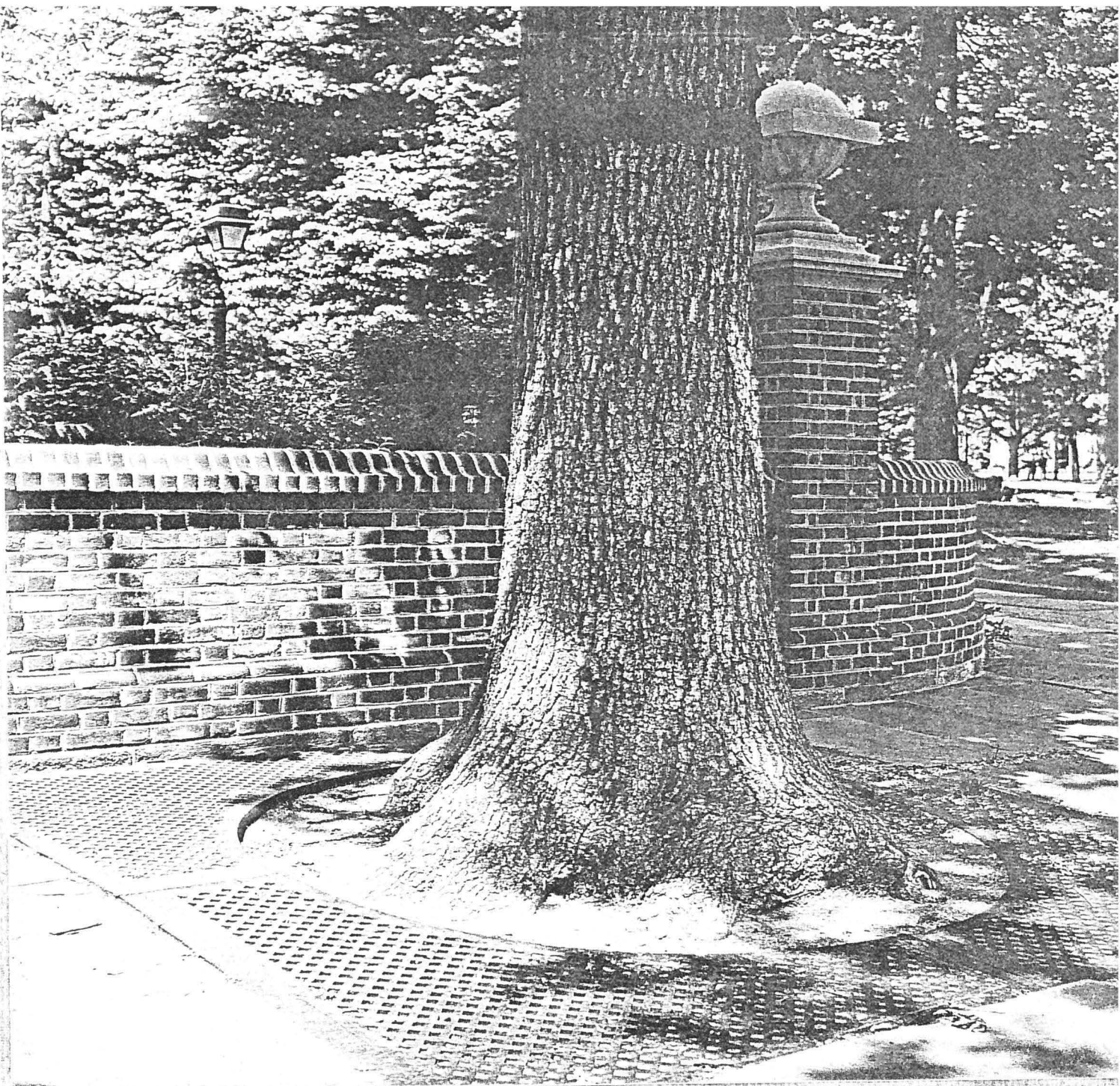
The cobblestones were set in sand.

A12 17624



The tree guard grill design.

A12.17666



... came from near Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

I 12.17571



Another bench design came from the old Crocker estate. They were found at an old people's home at Laguna and Bay.

A12.17603



After the Maritime Museum curator widened the seat two inches to accomodate the modern derriere, several dozens were cast.

B12 176.04



The patterns derived from it, however, were altered to create an hexagonal bench.

A12.17645



Southern Pacific's Castroville station near Salinas provided a bench design.

IR. 17563.1n

88-53



Wellsbach lamps from Baltimore were located.

A12.17665



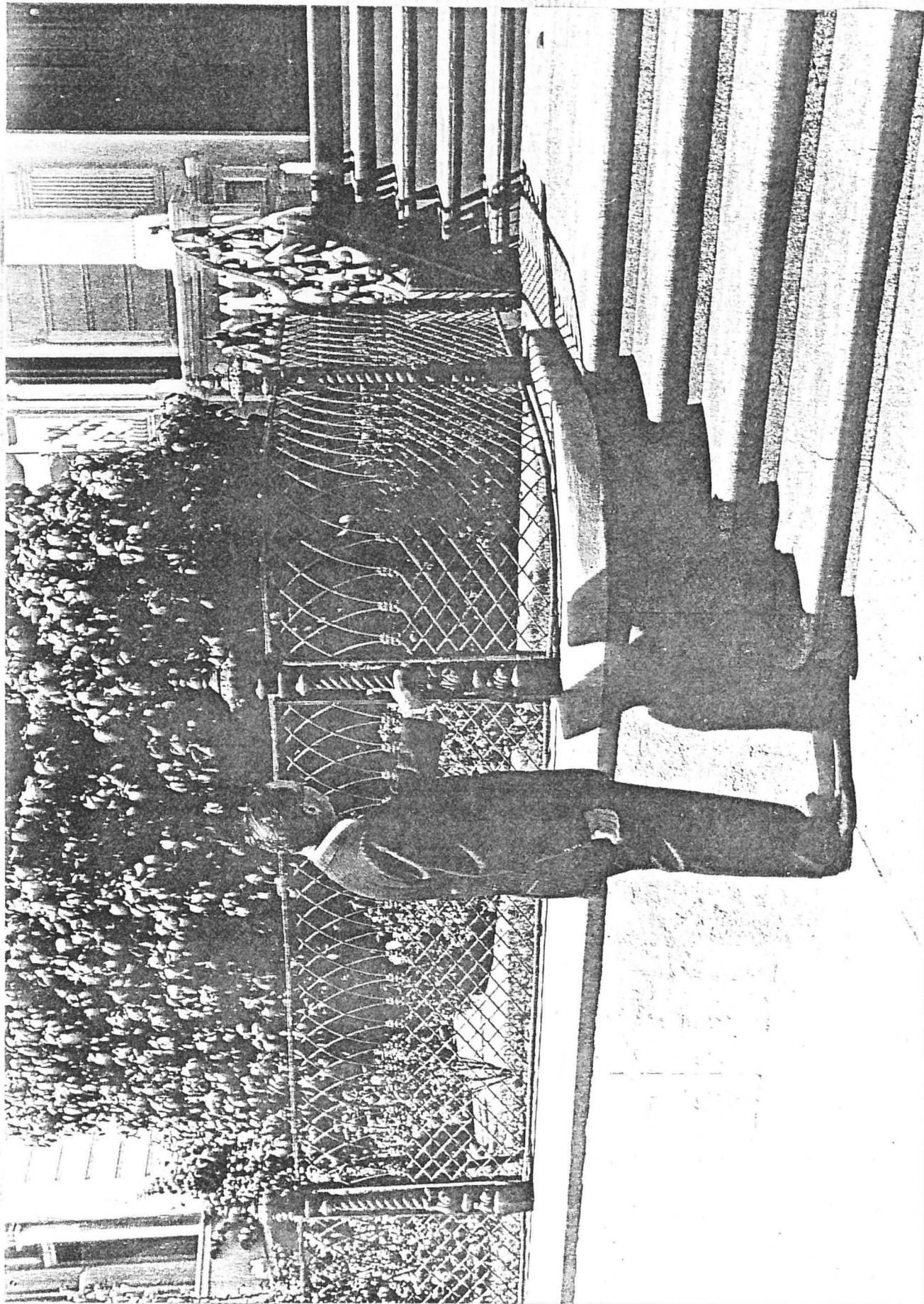
Cobblestones (basalt blocks) and cast iron to give the Haslett Building a proper settin

A12-1736 9.1



Actual gas lamp standards were obtained from an antique dealer in Cleveland, Ohio.

A12.17612



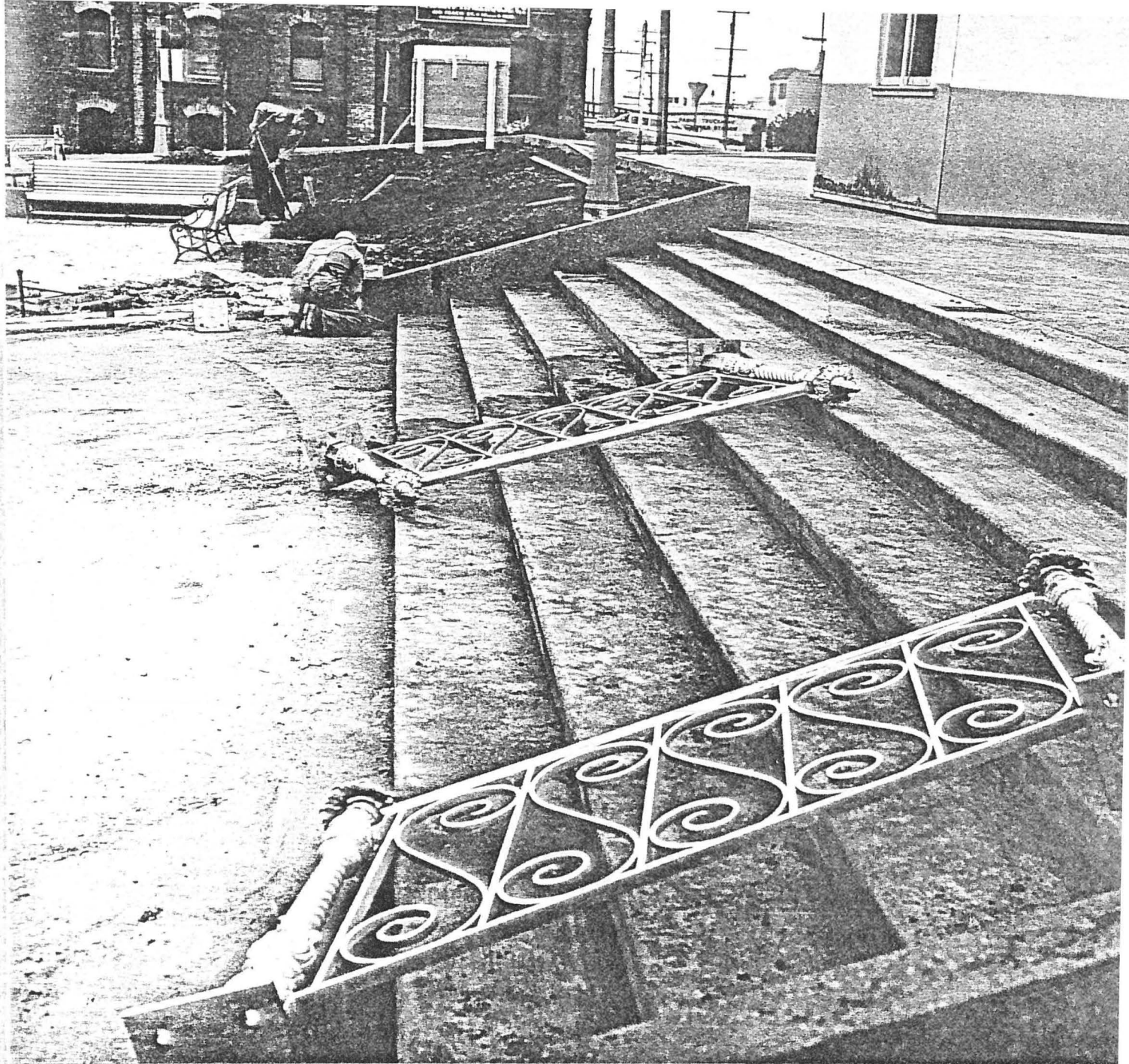
The ideal newell post turned up at 1362 South Van Ness Avenue. One post was borrowed to make a pattern.

A12-17576ⁿ



The railing design for between the posts came from the Western Addition before it was destroyed.

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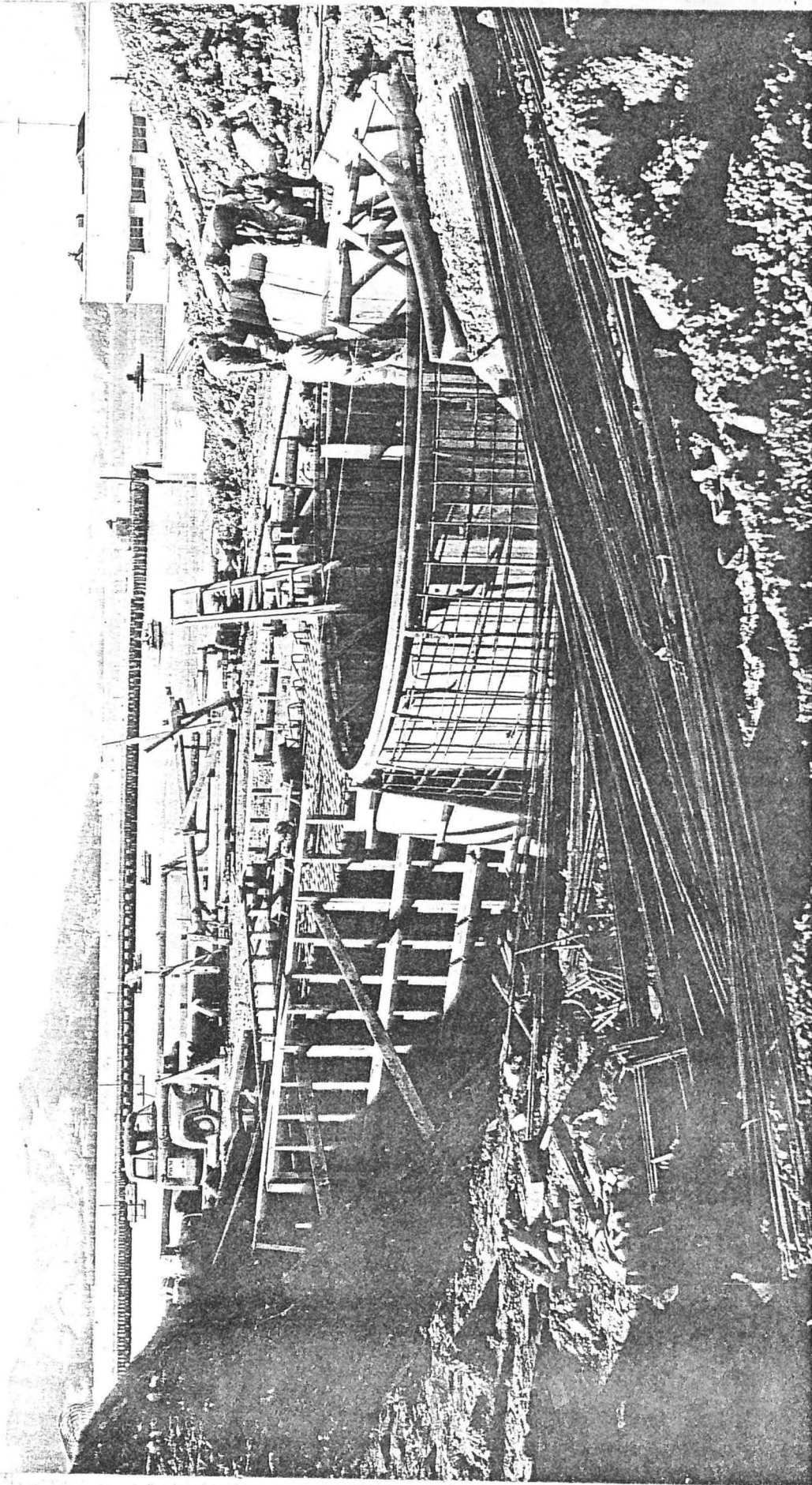
The Van Ness avenue newell posts and the Western Addition railing design are combined for the new park.

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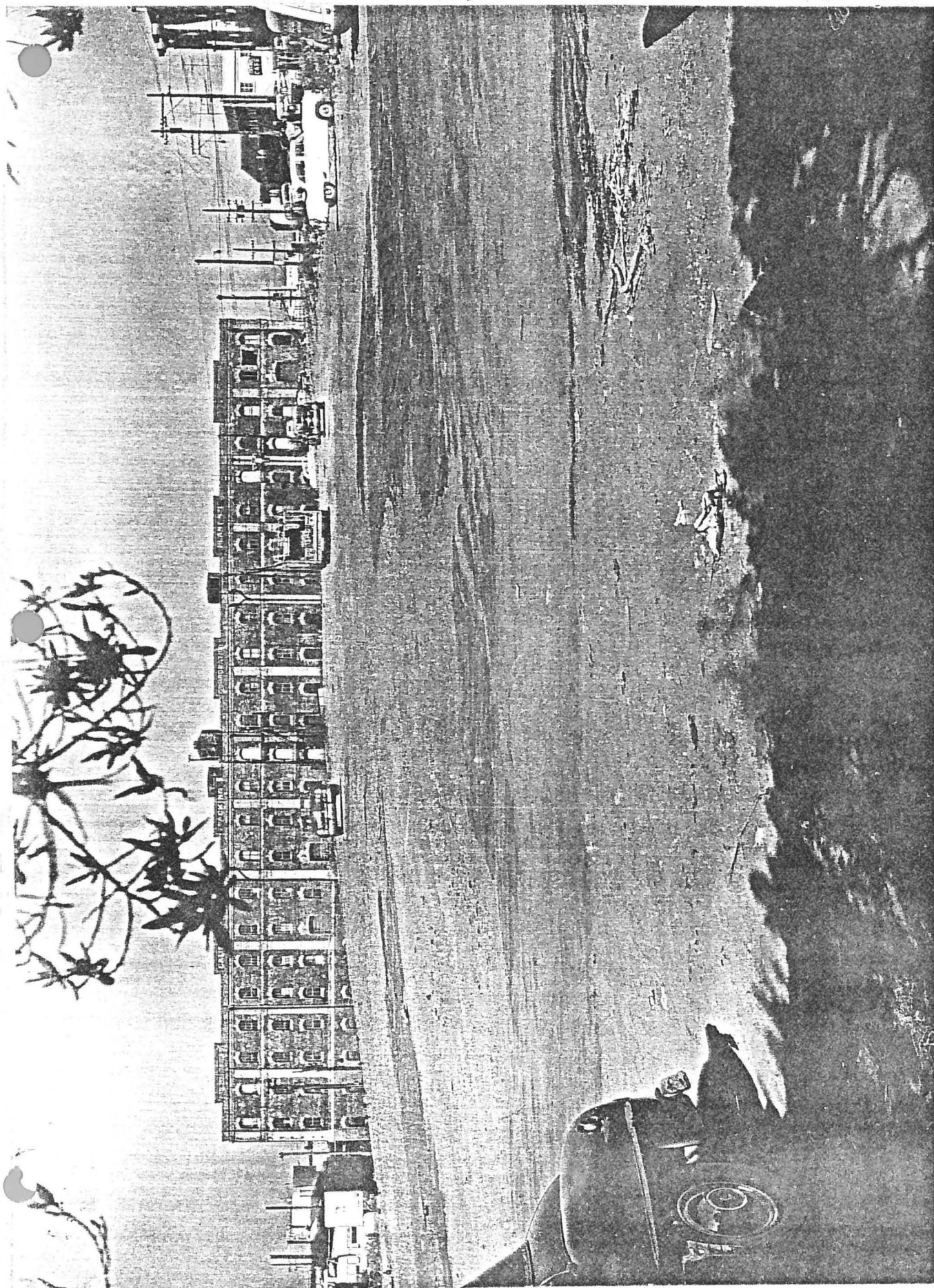
Three designs for a waiting room were rejected until a satisfactory one was found.

A12. 17620



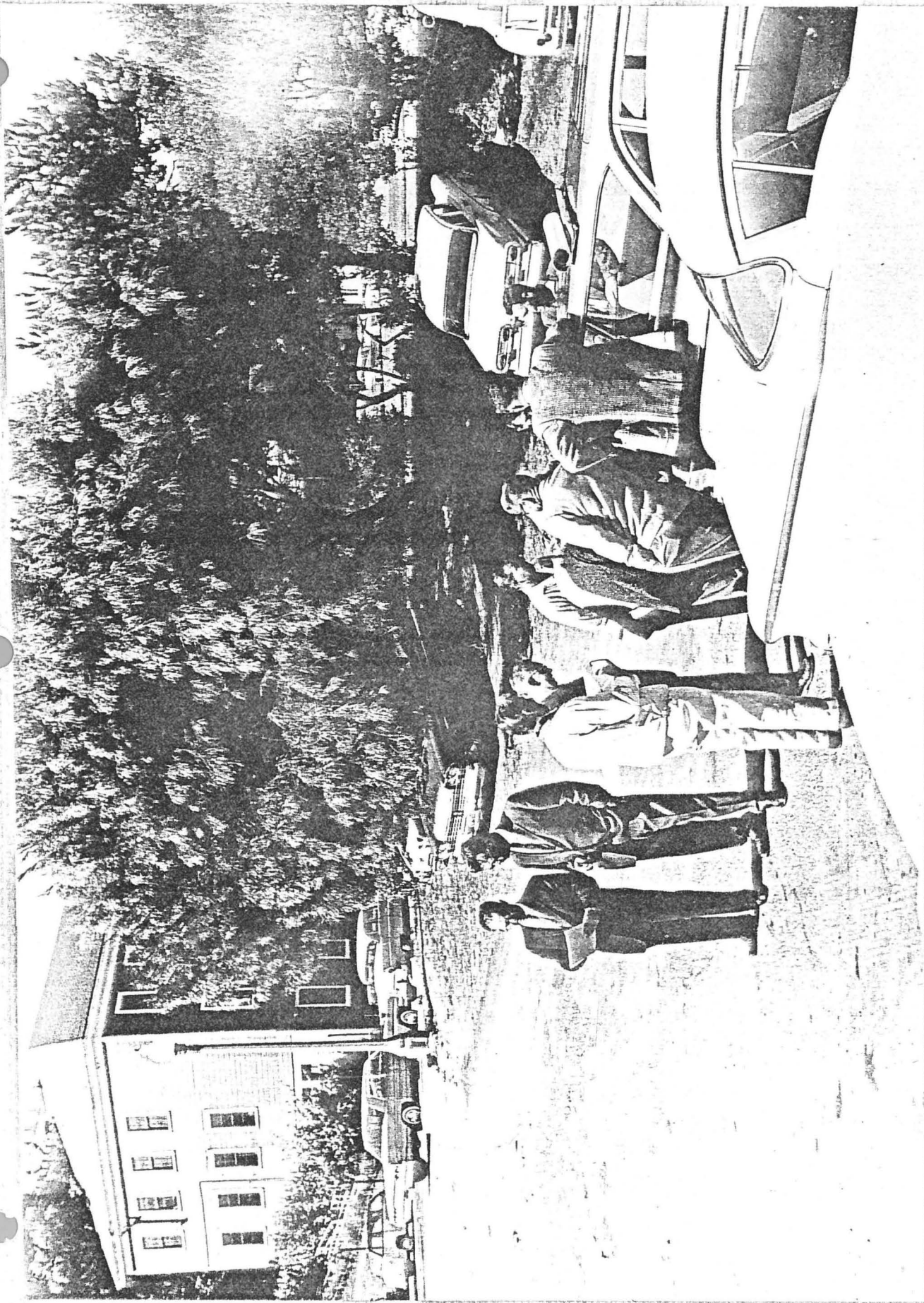
A cable car turnout was built.

A12.17549



Victorian Park site was an empty field.

A12-17547



The Maritime Museum persuaded the State Park department to make it a park.

A.12.17576n



Land fill was moved in.

A12.175 496

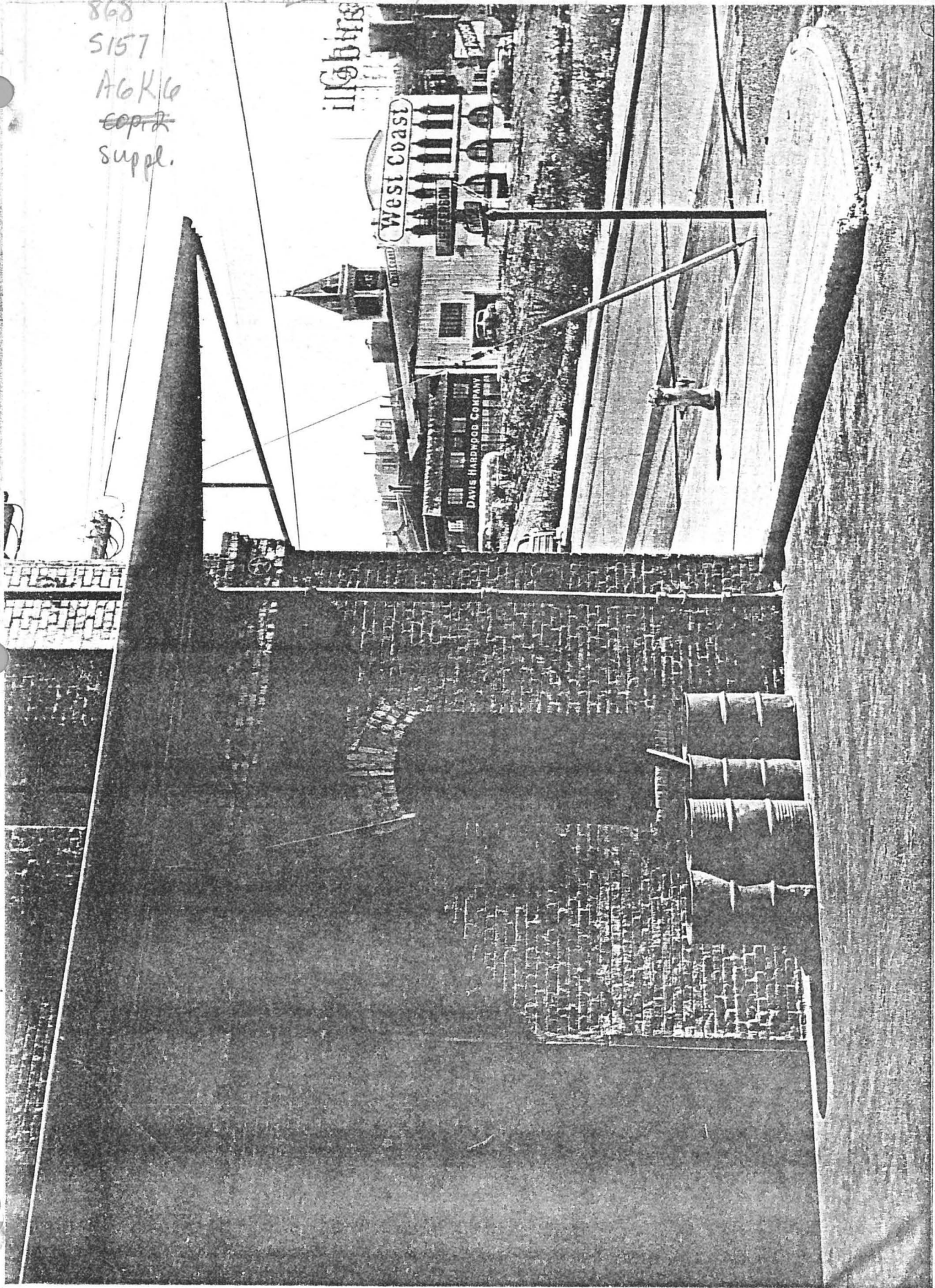
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suppl.

Kortum, Karl



A12.17545.1n

It was not a park, it was an industrial area . . .